

# The Four Agreements Summary

By Don Miguel Ruiz

In 2021, at age 43, Tom Brady won his 7th Superbowl, and earned his 5th MVP. This is an extraordinary achievement, but it hasn't all been plain sailing for the athlete. In 2016 Brady was suspended for four games because of an alleged cheating scandal. Brady asserts that *The Four Agreements* got him through this challenging time, and that he reads it every year. Brady says, 'How can I be more honest, accept things that don't go as planned? When you try to combat everything, at the end of the day you realize that you're responsible for yourself.'

*The Four Agreements* is a universally compelling and inspiring book based on Toltec wisdom. It's about freedom, and personal responsibility, and it offers advice on creating a more fulfilled life. By ridding ourselves of the agreements we're born and indoctrinated with, we can make new agreements, to gain new insight on how to live.

Don Miguel Ruiz is a bestselling Mexican author who focuses on Toltec and neoshamanistic teachings. By applying ancient teachings to contemporary life, he shows how we can all achieve spiritual enlightenment. Watkins listed him as one of the 100 Most Spiritually Influential Living People in 2018. He studied to be a surgeon, but after a near-death experience, he apprenticed to become a shaman.

We'll briefly go through the four agreements we should be following. We'll also look at how we can change our outlook on life, by following these simple and practical principles. Ruiz takes us back to basics and shows us that being content is about taking responsibility for ourselves. Furthermore, by integrating the four agreements into our everyday life,

we'll be able to make peace with ourselves, realize our dreams, and live a lot more harmoniously.

## **We Are Part of Everything**

Toltec society was pre-Aztec. Toltec civilization was intellectually and culturally gifted, and they were deeply spiritual and passed on their knowledge from generation to generation.

They had scientific, artistic, and spiritual knowledge that was passed down, and it's these very ideas that form the basis of this book. Toltec philosophy was born from direct communion with nature and its cycles, and these beliefs intersect with art, science, and spirituality. For the contemporary reader, who is often very disjointed from all the fundamental laws of nature, this book shows us how to realign our values. Furthermore, the personal freedom that can be gained by applying these agreements to our daily lives is both transformational and liberating.

Toltec lore concludes that everything is a manifestation of God, and that all of us embody God. Humans are made up of love and light, and reflect God. This means that all of us are sacred beings. We should see ourselves in all things, but the problem is that our vision has been clouded and distorted. Ruiz uses the metaphor of a mirror to explain this.

Initially, we could see ourselves in the mirror, but the mirror became unclear. As time passed, the mirror became smokey, so we couldn't see ourselves, others, or the world around us clearly. We have also failed to recognize that we're actually all the same. *The Four Agreements* aim to blow away the smoke so that we can have more clarity and understanding.

## Domesticating Humans

It sounds bizarre, but Toltec teachings argue that humans have been domesticated.

If we break this down, we'll see why this is the case. The argument is that we've been conditioned to conform in specific ways that are culturally, socially, and politically specific. It really is a roll of the dice in terms of how we grow up believing in the world around us, and adapting to specific normative roles and rules.

While many of us have individual and personal dreams, we've also been provided with a worldview that shapes who we are. It begins with our parents.

Think about your name for a second. How were you named, and have you ever thought about changing your name? Now think about what language you speak; how did you come to speak this particular language? Were you born into a religion? What are your core values?

These are fundamental things that form part of our identity and sense of belonging, yet we have no control over them. We can change and adapt some of these things, but we've been "domesticated" and influenced by

the outside dream from the time we were born. The outside dream is everything around us that's been culturally determined, and everything that we perceive as normal, how we decide what's right and wrong, and what we believe. These rules are things that we accept as true, and these understandings are often taken for granted.

How often do you question your religious beliefs, value systems, or the way that you live?

For many of us, we made these agreements with ourselves a long time ago, often without realizing it, and therefore we don't question them. Ruiz argues that we're born into the outside dream, we're indoctrinated, and consequently we seldom question how we think.

So how did we become domesticated?

Ruiz explains that when we grow up, we're not dissimilar to dogs in that we respond to a reward and punishment state of being. When we behave, our parents reward us, and when we misbehave, we're punished.

You've heard of the phrase "childlike wonder," haven't you? Have you ever noticed how children experience such joy and inquisitive delight when they're going about their daily lives? The trouble is being inquisitive has its risks, and you'll often hear a parent discourage children from exploring too much, or shouting 'No!' Hence, many of the traits we're born with are domesticated out of us, through nurturing and education.

After a while, we take the reins of our own domestication. Our specific beliefs and values determine our behavior, and we accept the world around us for what it is. While we may not have consciously agreed to

our worldviews, we accept them nonetheless.

Two of the most profound agreements that we accept are the inner Judge and the inner Victim.

What would you like to change about yourself? Do you think that you'd be happier if you were different?

Many of us are our own harshest critics. We believe that we should act and look in certain ways, and often these beliefs are based on the outside dream. When we don't live up to this dream, then we feel guilty and unsatisfied. And, the thing with guilt is that it's relentless. It never seems to go away.

Experiencing so much guilt makes us a victim, and it's difficult to move on from mistakes when we're continually reminding ourselves of them. This has a snowball effect, and you may find yourself not only punishing yourself over and over again, but punishing the people around you. This leads us to expect other people to suffer because we're suffering.

We dream about our realities, and we live inside our personal dreams and interact with others based on this. So what if we abandoned our previous agreements and accepted new and healthier agreements that allow us to thrive?

## **Words Are Mightier Than the Sword**

We're often told to choose our words carefully, and there's a reason for this. Words have incredible power. Ruiz explains that we need to be 'impeccable with our word' because words come directly from God.

Can you remember a time when someone said something incredibly hurtful to you? Of course you can, because words have significant staying power. Remembering this will help you to be kinder and gentler with your words, because just as we may remember the cruel things people say, we also remember the kind things.

If you grow up being told that you can't sing, or that you're annoying, or not good-looking enough, you'll believe this to be true, and you'll make an agreement with yourself that this is the truth. It'll take you a long time to reach a new agreement and to believe differently about yourself. If we take this to an extreme macro level, dictators and populist leaders often use their words as a powerful mode of propaganda. Hitler managed to get almost an entire country to agree to his beliefs, and thus Nazi Germany was born.

According to our author, negative words are like Black Magic. Gossip is a compelling form of Black Magic, and significantly influences how we perceive the world and other people. For example, if someone says they don't like somebody, this clouds our judgment about that person. We may not have even met the person they're talking about, but the gossip taints our perception of them. Ruiz says that gossip is like a poison, and whether it's intentional, or unintentional we need to be more critical of how we deal with it.

Being impeccable with our words may seem obvious, but it's a bit more nuanced than we may think. This is the most important of all four

agreements, and "impeccable" is really at the heart of it. Impeccable means "without sin," and so this agreement means that our words can be a sin against both ourselves and others. Learning to choose and use our words carefully is therefore very important. Hence we need to learn to say what we mean, and speak with a sense of integrity and honesty. Positivity spreads through our words, and this makes us more productive and fulfilled.

Furthermore, using our words for good, means that we uplift ourselves and those around us. The White Magic created by positive and affirming words helps to destroy any Black Magic that may linger. So remember, use your words for good, and spread love rather than fear. You can easily measure the impeccability of your word by the self-love that you feel.

## **It's Not Personal**

Eckhart Tolle suggests, 'When you realize It's not personal, there is no longer a compulsion to react as it were.'

It's not easy to adopt the attitude of not taking things personally, but it's a lot easier once we master the first agreement. If we're more careful and impeccable with our words, we learn to become calmer and more in control. This sense of enlightenment helps us to realize that we can control ourselves, but nothing else.

When we take things personally it sets off a chain reaction of disaster.

Can you remember the last argument you had? Most arguments happen because we take something personally. Taking things personally leads to us getting offended, then we retaliate, then the person takes what we

said personally, then they get offended and say something back that offends us. This loop could continue for ages, and usually causes a lot of resentment.

So how do we learn not to take things personally?

The very first thing to realize is that anything negative isn't about you; it's about the other person. So whenever you're about to get offended by something someone says, pause, and then remember that this is about them. Everyone is dealing with their own issues, and often they deflect by loading their issues onto you. Everyone has their own truth, and their own worldview, and you don't have to become absorbed in it. When you suffer at the hands of other people, this is needless, because you've just reacted to their opinion of you.

If someone calls you stupid, this is their opinion and manifests from their low self-esteem. Entertaining this insult is a complete waste of time because it reflects on them, not on you. It takes practice, and a strong will, but good things start to happen when we realize that taking things personally is a futile and pointless exercise.

The goal is to become immune to what other people think about us. Once this happens, we can show our vulnerability, open up to love and trust, and be unafraid of being hurt. What's more, we'll find ourselves at peace and be able to treat others with more empathy.

## **Most Assumptions Are Wrong**



We've all seen quotes about assumptions, yet most of us continue to believe things that aren't true.

When we make assumptions, we fill in the gaps in the story with what we believe to be accurate, or what could be possible. This is very dangerous and can lead to a lot of misunderstandings.

We often make assumptions when we're in relationships. The first thing that we do is that we assume we both want the same things, and inevitably we're surprised and let down when we realize that what we believed isn't true. If you assume your partner wants to spend every weekend together, you'll be disappointed when they don't schedule that time with you. This will lead to resentment and unnecessary suffering.

The key to assumptions is challenging them. You need to know what your expectations are, and what other people expect from you. And if you don't know the answers, then you need to ask. Asking questions and doing research is the only way to challenge assumptions and to seek the truth. An exercise to try is that whenever you're tempted to assume something, force yourself to ask questions and communicate, rather than jumping to conclusions. Eventually, this will become a natural response.

## **If You Do Your Best, there's No Failure**

Doing our best has been something that we've been told over and over again, but what does "best" actually mean?

Our best isn't something that we can assign a specific value to. On some days, our best could be a fantastic feat, and on other days it could simply

be getting out of bed. Some days we're very healthy, and on other days we're unwell. So our best is relative to how we're feeling physically and emotionally.

One of the key ways to do our best is to form healthy habits, and this way we will become better gradually. We don't want to overexert ourselves and then become overwhelmed and overwrought. Ruiz says that good things happen when we do our best, and that it has a knock-on effect that extends to all areas of our lives. If we strive to do our best, we're more positive and more productive. We're also happier and free from the guilt and blame associated with procrastination. It's not about being perfect, but rather about serving yourself and honoring God.

To do our best, we should learn when to say no and when to say yes. We should also learn when to let go of things. Doing our best means focusing on the positives, living in the present, and taking action.

Ruiz suggests that if we harness the mindset to continually strive towards doing our best, we will be more careful with our words, we'll be less likely to take things personally, and we'll be less inclined to make assumptions. In short, we need to do our best to adhere to the three previous agreements.

## **In Conclusion**

There's a line from the 1998 film *The Truman Show*, 'We accept the reality of the world with which we're presented.' When we bring awareness to the fact that our reality is a dream that we choose to live, we recognize our ability to change it. This insightful book offers extraordinary wisdom and concrete advice on how we can live according to our own truth.

The basic knowledge from Toltec philosophy teaches us to face our fears, gain control over emotions, learn forgiveness, and discard previous agreements that we've made around judgment, victimhood, fear, fog, and confusion.

Have you accepted the reality of your world, and do you wish that you could change it? As Eleanor Roosevelt said, 'The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.'